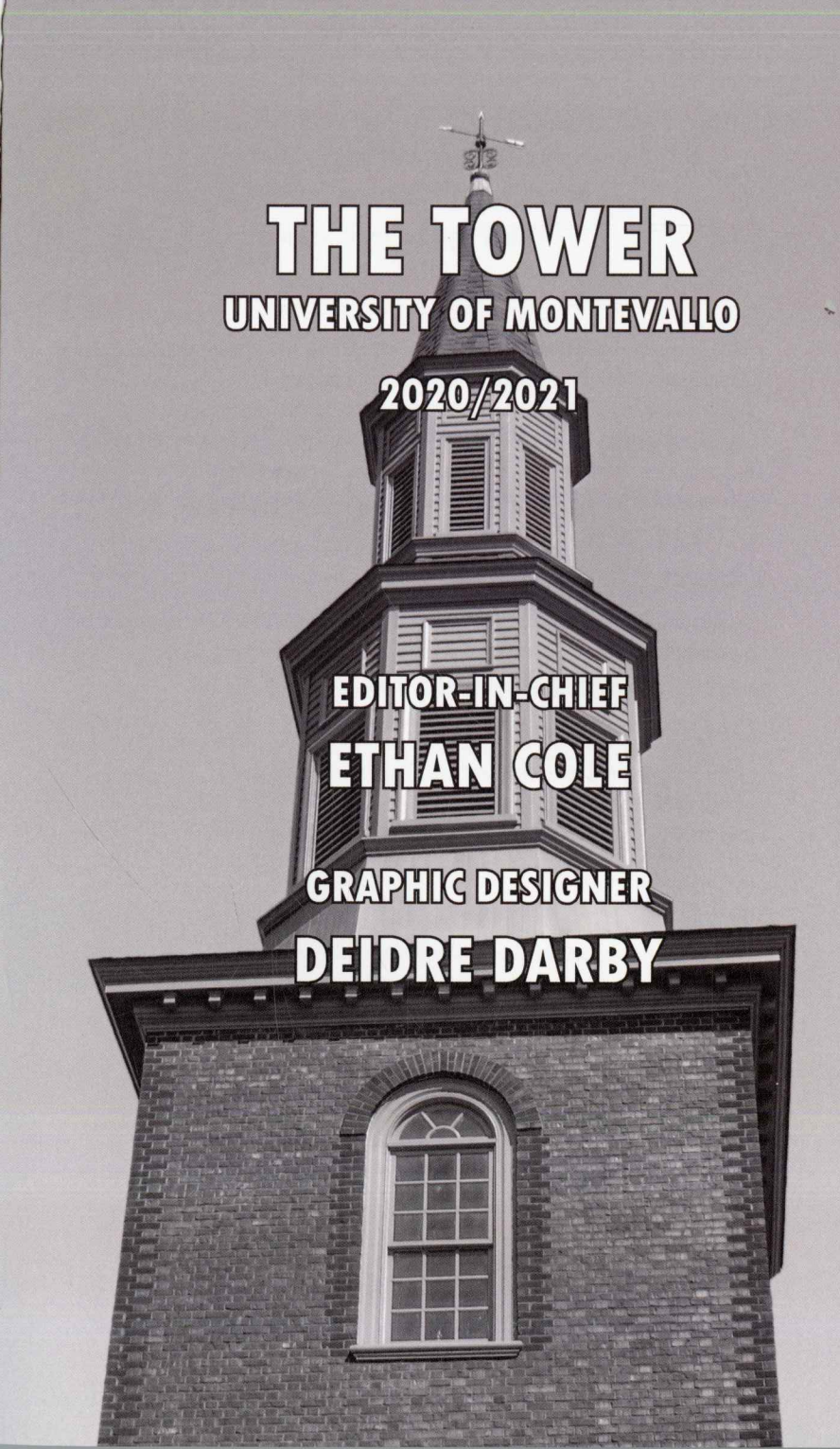
THE TOWER
2020/2021
UNIVERSITY OF MONTEVALLO


THE TOWER
UNIVERSITY OF MONTEVALLO
2020/2021
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This year has been historic; it has been unprecedented. Things have changed in countless ways for many of us and for many of us they are still changing. It has been filled with unique challenges.

I'm so impressed with the level of artistry, talent and dedication that has been exemplified by all the artists and writers here at Montevallo, and I'm grateful to have had the opportunity to curate this collection of their works. I hope our contributors find that this year's volume does justice to their awesome talent.

With no further ado, here it is...

Ethan Jeffrey Cole

Editor- in-Chief 2021

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All I Know
Meredith Mosley

I dream of knowing her.
I long for her simplicity
and her depth.

The simple pleasure of sharing
a cold ice cream.
Her warm radiance as she grins
back at me.

My mind seeks for a way into hers.
I stepped one foot into her world,
onto a path I can travel
no further.

I am leaving this place, but
will she?
I don't know enough to know.

All I know is the tint of her lips
and the curve of her figure,
the ring of her laughter
and the bounce of her curls.

I feel obliviously transparent,
yet
equally discernable.
I feel real, yet
much too much like a dream.

I feel conviction running
through my chest
like the hare fighting
to win the race.

I feel it surging through my
veins
with the slinking steps behind
me.
I see and believe,
nonetheless.

Who has come before?
All I know
is the small of her back
and the hue of her blouse.

Untitled
Ink and Watercolor
Natalie Henderson

A Little Gift for Herself
Celine Smith

This is suburbia, where the plastic like grass looks like it's combed every day. The trees are so new the leaves are like peach fuzz. The sky so unhaltingly flat that it looks like God or whoever is holding up a piece of blue cloth. The houses mimic each other like parrots.

She is a stay-at-home mother with no kids to mother, but she takes care of the house every day as if she is preparing for a child to appear on her doorstep with a stork flying high above. It never happens though. Her husband has already left so she vacuums the carpet with a Dyson making sure to leave behind nice parallel lines. She hears an old rumbling engine and knows it is the mailman. No one in this neighborhood has a car that rumbles and if it does make that rough harsh sound it is because it is a sports car.

When the mailman rolls to the next house, she stops her chore and goes out to get the mail. The sun burns a circle into her back as she collects the mail and sorts through it. Coupons, invitations to luncheons, brunches, and charitable galas, stray bills, and then there is a red envelope. A red envelope with a slightly textured surface from the micro glitter dust embedded into it. A wax seal in black, that has the head of Medusa artfully impressed on it. She fingers the softened wax with her French nail tip and it easily comes undone. On heavy cardstock, a list of instructions has been printed. She feels the indentions of each letter before she reads it and is appalled when she does.

1. Download Cash App on your husband's phone.
2 Put it in a discreet location where he will not find it.
3. Use his debit or credit card when making the new account.

4. Every time he leaves his phone with you, Cash App yourself an unnoticeable amount of money.

She is beyond perplexed. Who sent this to her? There is no return address, and the letter does not close with who it's from. She goes back inside and sits on the couch leaving footprints on the freshly vacuumed carpet. She reads the directions again and again. Why would she do this? Why did the sender think that she would do this by just sending an anonymous letter? She throws the letter away and completes her daily tasks.

When he comes home from dinner she is pouring sauvignon blanc into their wine glasses. They eat spaghetti. She makes the pasta and sauce from scratch. They watch the news together and head to bed by 8:30. He takes a shower and while she is in bed she notices his phone and wallet on his nightstand and snatches it. Her fingers tremble as she inputs the code. She downloads Cash App, creates an account, and links his card, then hides the app on the second wall of his fitness folder that he never touches. By the time he comes out of the shower the paraphernalia is back on his bedside and her head is resting on her pillow but her eyes are wide open. She told herself that she would not follow the instructions at all, but then again why would she go to all that trouble if she wasn't going to follow through.

At first, it is harmless. She starts asking him to get refills of water. While in the kitchen she sends herself a singular dollar. But then she begins asking for more refills, guzzling down her drinks as if she's been dehydrated for years. A singular dollar turns to three. Sometimes five or maybe ten depending on how rude he is to her. One of her many jobs around the house was finances so he would never catch wind. At first, she loathes herself but that quickly dissipates. Sending herself innocuous amounts

of money becomes more pleasurable than asking her husband for money like a teenager. They had more than enough. It was harming nobody really. So the months rolled on and then a year and then two years and then there are a few thousand dollars that have been sent from herself to herself. At first, she never cashed out but then she did and that money began piling up in her bank account. She felt like a dragon hoarding gold.

One weekday he does not have to work. She's already sent herself eight dollars. He goes outside to get the mail and she stupidly thinks nothing of it. He comes in, brows scrunched until it looks like he has a unibrow. She looks at him confused then notices the open red envelope in one hand with his phone in the other casting a green glow on his face.

With an abrasive gasp dries her throat out. Her eyes widen in disbelief. She feels like her bowels have fallen out in front of him. The floor has suddenly been removed from underneath her feet and she falls through.

Untitled
Pen and Watercolor
Kamden

Familiar Silence
Ink
Natalie Henderson

Conecuh
Madisen DeMent

This landscape, moony and lethargic as it is,
speaks lovingly of aloneness.
Its voice, made of a myriad of tones,
implores wistfully for a listener.

The solitary house on the hill,
waves a wilted flag at the barn,
which creaks a greeting
to the cows grazing in the pasture.

Heifers groan their days miseries
on the scornful ears of corn.
Stalks whisper sinuous praise at the moon,
yet she remains supercilious and silent.

Coyotes moan to their mistress,
melancholy notes which
strike chords in the soul
no instrument can evoke.

Wind chimes melt into the caress of a breeze
and begin hymning such serene sounds
that the rest fall into desuetude
just to listen.

It's because I have tasted these bijou voices,
that I have found unending companionship in nothing.
I am alone, but the land sings to me,
and I am not lonely.

Hand Me Downs
Oil and Fabric
Megan Boddie

The Kool-Aid Man
Katie Martin

I'm lying in bed, supine, when the man sized jug bursts through the drywall. Chunks of plaster fly everywhere, littering my red bedspread and falling like snowflakes into my dark hair. Droplets of blood red juice slosh onto my outstretched arms, which are shielding my face from the debris. I scream in terror, knowing that this thing will quickly overpower me. I am only five feet even, no match for this gargantuan mascot. "Ohhh yeahhhh" the thing intones in its deep voice, smiling, looking me over with those menacing eyes. Its mouth opens, and I see sharp, glinting teeth encapsulated in plastic gums-

The jug on my desk, embossed with the very face that I had dreamed of (minus the shark-like chompers) smiles at me benignly. The jug is transparent, colorless, a bit yellowed with age. This iteration of the Kool-Aid Man would never hurt a fly. He is content to stand there on the desk of a college student. His only duty is to be the perfect vase for her flowers.

This Wild Piece of Us
Katie Martin

These are the days that I
will remember, I think,
when I am old and gray.
The wind whipping through
the open window,
lifting the golden tendrils
of your hair.
Vince Neil shouting at
The Devil over the radio.
This feeling of unadulterated
Freedom.
You are so lovely.
Splashed in sunlight.
I will always know you like this.
That devil may care smile that pulls
at my heart.
We will grow and change,
Ah, but
this wild piece of us
will always be twenty.

Untitled
Enamel Pin Design
Emma Grider

I (eye)
Emma M.

I mop my floors with bleach
even though the smell sinks Into my skin and forces gags from my core.
It's not because I'm germaphobic,
I'm just sentimental.
It's Who I use to be.

I am a constructer.
I create and destroy the pictures in my mind with mud and molasses.
I create animals
Out of pigment and instinct and they always follow me.
All the clocks, time bombs and hands ticking up my throat as I wash the dirt off my hands.
This is not who I use to be
But somebody I thought I was.

I am Agoraphobic,
Only because of the eyes under my bed and in my hair.
Watching me take shelter under weighted blankets from the bodies in my living room.
Watching me brush the sand out of my teeth as I have been eating bad poetry.
Watching me scrape grease off the pans, the same film an ex lover made.
It's who I use to be, and who I am
Because people don't change like the books tell you they do.

I could write about angels and god
The eyes of storms but it's all a matter of messes left by dead actors.
A heroin overdose never cleaned up because this
Is who I am.
I am one part left alone and two parts sinking my teeth into the public eye.
I am exactly

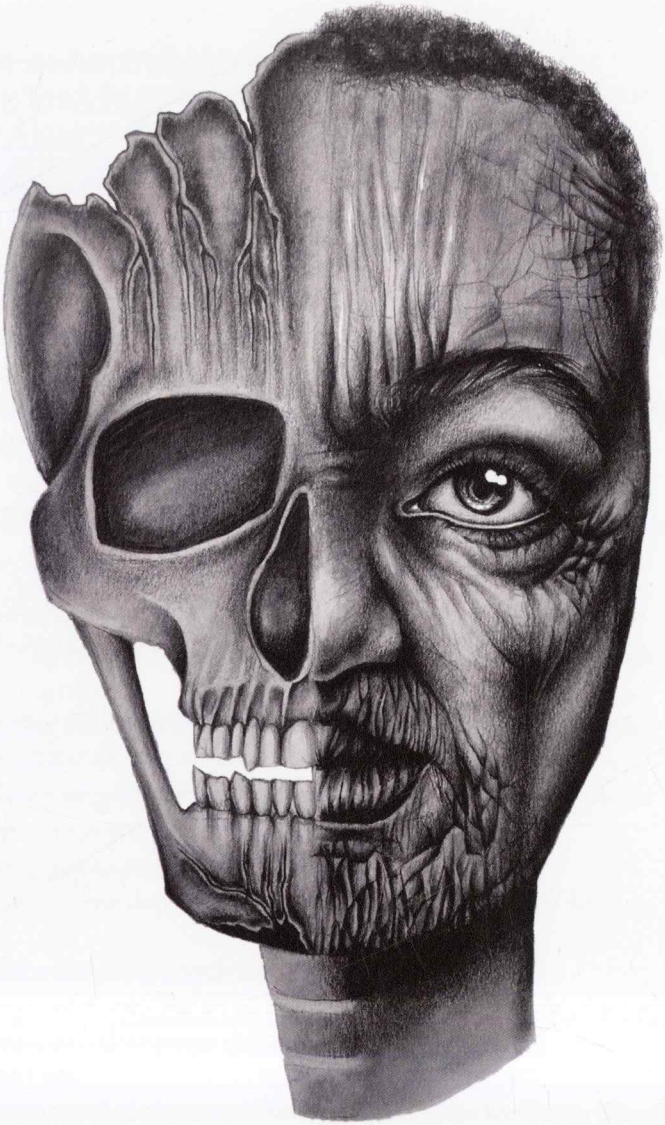
Who I said I was.

Phobia orgasma
Emma M.

It is neurotic at birth, 3am or 6pm
a true depiction of glass,
Breakable,
evil and content.
The sickening sensation of a body on your own, it changes you
and creates a new being
.
Together, you are Enticing, throbbing into extinction while the
trance is just an energy, soulful and mating, so Exquisite.
Pins and needles, serotonin spiking while the chest caves in on
itself

Hold onto something, anything just as long as it's sturdy enough
for the grasp you'll have on it.
Lovely, Moaning, escaping.
a Progression of a being that does not exist.

Then, the body is covered.
There has been a death of someone you thought I was.
sleeping faced away,
Sleeping on the floor,
Sleeping as a body.



Rot
Pencil
Deidre Darby

The Poetry of Androids
Adella Herron

Two inter-Faces a field of fire

Dire yellow, red, orange, higher

Computerized, mechanized

With alloy scar tissue atomized

By my atomic android suicide.

I am the automaton lost in the crypts of cryptology

Cold in the antimatter, coded, drifting freely through

A digitalized haze; higher, higher, up the demon DNA spire

My spindled nervous tissue is impaled on the steeple of science,

Optic fiber arteries unfolding and florescent with an afterglow,

My evanescent passion of many inter-Faces is misunderstood

Before it's forgotten in the flow of perpetual dusk.

Leave
Lionel Pettus

Something exits through pain

An acceptance, sort familiarity

Companion to a forgetful friend

Remembering the minutes that moved

Slightly changing my life

Drastically damaged

Emotions are climate controlled

These bad times build character

Destroy weaknesses that I avoided

Embraces the strength I overlook

Thanks for all at it's specific time

Late thoughts can bring early regrets

Something can be over

Others can't be started

In the midst of memories

Below the surface life lingers

The life most don't see

Let alone feel, numb to a fault

Expressive with no crowd

Response to myself, the first to see

Last thought before I changed my mind

Persuade to propose a difference

In add to the arrangement we have now

And forever more, the end runs from itself

The start chases me around

Circling the box I found no comfort in

House sweet house

Hidden Blooms

Katie Martin

The oppressive Alabama heat
Radiates off the concrete
But I am more focused
On my parent's azalea bushes
This tangled mess of flowers
That around this time every year
Becomes a menagerie
Of bumblebees wizzing
To and fro, collecting nectar
And butterflies, gently suckling
The azaleas with their proboscis

Above the bushes, on the wall
A blue tailed skink peers out
From beneath an electrical box
As if to say hello
Across the way,
Yellow trumpet flowers
There is a bird's nest
Outside the front door
So I make sure to open it slowly
Because I never know
When mama bird will be there
Perched atop her eggs,
Cultivating new life
When I see her there,
Tracking me with her dark eyes
I greet her quietly,
Hello ma'am
And then tip toe back inside

The quiet trappings of nature
Out here in the country.

Captured Scholar
Watercolor and Gouache
Natalie Henderson

Truth Be Told
Kelli Sellers

"Jason...Jason...Jason..." a meek, female voice spoke, waking Jason up. Wiping his eyes, he saw his six-year-old sister, Abigail, standing beside his bed. Yawning, he glanced at his phone to check the time when he saw a text notification from his mother from twenty minutes prior:
Mom
Filling in for a coworker again. Had to leave early. Please get Abby to school for me. Love you both.

The time read 4:55 A.M. With his Government test in four hours, Jason needed all the sleep he could get, but he knew once he was awake, there was no going back to sleep. Slightly frustrated, he turned his attention back to the matter at hand.
"Gail, why are you up this early?" Jason asked. While everyone else called Abigail "Abby," he started calling her "Gail" a couple years prior after she came home from the first few days of Pre-K frustrated that there were two other girls in her class named Abby. "They are nice," he would hear her say as he came in the front door from football practice, "but no one else has the same names in my class." She liked to beat to the rhythm of her own drum, even if it meant having a different name to go by. Noticing how his mother was discreetly getting annoyed hearing the same rant over and over every afternoon, Jason came up with the idea of calling her "Gail" when he watched We Are Marshall, nicknaming her after Gail Morehouse. He thought the nickname would last only through the school year, but she loved it so much that he decided to let it be one of the many beats to her drum.

"I had a nightmare and can't go back to sleep," she answered. She had her arms wrapped around Cuddles, her favorite plush teddy bear that their father had given her for her third birthday. "I went

to Mommy's bed, but she wasn't there."

"She had to leave early for work."

"Again?"

Jason saw her tilt her head down to the ground in disappointment as her arms let go of Cuddles a little bit. They barely saw their mother as it was in between her early mornings and late nights working as a nurse at the local hospital. She started picking up a few extra hours about three years ago when their father was killed in a car accident to make up for the loss of income their father brought in as a construction worker. This was only supposed to be a temporary arrangement, but as the bills continued to pile up week after week, the more hours she took on. Jason quickly stepped up to become the man of the house. As soon as he turned sixteen a couple months later, he got a job as a cashier at the local grocery store, the hotspot for high schoolers wanting a part time job to spend on the luxuries of life, but for Jason, it meant covering his football fees and paying car payments and insurance for his 2006 maroon Ford Fusion he drove to school, work, and often to the local elementary school to drop-off Gail.

"But do you know what that means?" He smiled as she perked her eyes to make eye contact with him. "I get to take you to school today. Would you like that?" Her discouraged frown transformed into her sweet, innocent smile and nodded her head as her thin, brunette pigtails bounced up and down in agreement.

"Let's get you back in bed." Still half asleep, he got out of bed and guided Gail back towards her room. With an early start, Jason had the idea to get ready really quick and still have time to study before school.

"Can we have pancakes for breakfast?"

"I don't know if I'll have time to—"

"Please, Jason." He couldn't help but be drawn into her wide eyes as she blinked her dark eyelashes at him. He knew he couldn't resist her plea, justifying that he hadn't made them in a while and that a good breakfast would be nice for him to have before taking his test.

"I guess we can."

"Thank you! Thank you! Thank you!" She clung to his leg, grinning. "Will they have chocolate chips?"

Jason chuckled softly to himself upon her request. "I'll see what I can do."

After getting Gail settled, he started to get ready for school, which gave him an abundance of time to think. He loved his family and wanted to do whatever he could to help, but early mornings like this usually meant long and tiring days: getting both of them ready for school, then morning workouts on time (if the car rider line doesn't take forever). Then classes all day (if he doesn't fall asleep). After that, football practice or work (sometimes both) after school. That's all prior to going home for dinner (whether his mother is home to cook or if he has to cook), helping her with chores and with Gail all while having homework still left to do AND preparing for college.

Lord, help me through another long day.

***

By the time he sat down at his desk around 5:35 A.M. to study, it wasn't that long—so he thought—before it was 6:00 A.M. "Already?" He bookmarked his Government textbook with his notes prior to closing it. He made his way to the kitchen, plugging in the griddle to warm up as he mixed the pancake batter, including his sister's requested addition. Luckily for Jason, the smell of pancakes that cooked on the griddle woke Gail up as she, still half asleep, made her way to the kitchen table.

"Morning sleepy head," Jason greeted her cheerfully as he plated Gail's two smaller pancakes on one of the two plates he

had on the counter.

"Did you add chocolate chips?"

"Of course," he replied. "What kind of brother would I be if I didn't?" She giggled at his question, admiring her brother's sense of humor. Jason loved hearing his sister laugh, but honestly, he also wanted chocolate chip pancakes.

He heard his phone alert him that he got a text from his friend Adrian.

Adrian

Hi Jason. My mom's car battery died, and my dad's already at work. I hope this is not too much to ask, but if you are able to, can I please catch a ride with you this morning to school?

Jason hesitated. Finding where he lived was not the problem since he had been there a couple of times over the course of the summer to run football plays with him. He wanted to help Adrian out, but of all days, it had to be that day when he'd had little sleep, hardly any studying done, and had to fight the elementary school car line. He had cut it close to missing morning workouts before, but that was only him. He would hate getting Adrian there late on his own expense but decided to ask anyways.

Jason

I can but got to take my sister to school today.
Can you survive a school car line?

Adrian

Thanks, man. I don't mind the car line.
If I can survive practice drills, I can survive that lol.

***

Finally out the door, Jason tossed his backpack and gym bag into the trunk of his car as Gail buckled her seatbelt, her backpack and matching lunch box placed in the empty row of seats beside her. As he made his way to the driver's side, he felt

his phone vibrate in his blue jean pocket and pulled it out. His mom was calling him.

"Hello?"

"Morning, Jason," she huffed. "How's everything going?"

"Everything's good." Jason opened the door and started to get the car running. "We are in the car about to head to school."

"Good. Earlier than usual."

"Yeah, Adrian doesn't have a ride to school this morning, so I'm helping him out."

"That's nice of you, Jason. Just don't be late for workouts."

"Yes ma'am. Let me put you on speaker so I can pull out of the driveway." Tapping the speakerphone button, he placed his phone in the cup holder of his car and buckled his seatbelt.

"Did Gail give you any trouble?" After putting the car in reverse, he turned his head back to look out his rearview window, carefully looking for cars. Seeing it was safe, he backed up into the street, shifted the gear to drive, and started the drive to school.

"Mom, when has Gail given us any trouble?" he answered jokingly as he glanced in his rear view mirror to see Gail giggling at his response.

"True," she replied, giggling along with them. "Well, I should be able to get her from after school care this afternoon. Thank you for helping out this morning."

"It's fine."

"Did y'all pray yet?"

"We were about to." Praying on the way to school was something their father started when Jason was in kindergarten. While Jason was grateful that his father had instilled this in his life, this also would sometimes lead him to reminisce on the fact that he was not there to see them grow up and reach the important milestones in their life. He knew that he would see his father again in Heaven, but when life got overwhelming, he missed being able to confide in his father, something he struggled to do

with his mother.

"Can I pray?" Gail asked eagerly.

"Yes, you can," replied their mother. Glancing in the rearview mirror, Jason saw Gail closed her eyes and bowed her head.

"Dear God," she began. "Thank you for this day. Please help us as we go to school. Let us have a good day. Bring us home tonight. Amen."

"Amen," Jason and their mother said about the same time.

"Well, I've got to get back to work. Have a great day. Love y'all."

"Love you, too," Jason and Gail answered in unison a few moments prior to their mother ending the call.

***

When Jason pulled up to Adrian's house, he pressed the unlock button on his driver door before he looked up to spot Adrian with his bags ready to go. As he was about to head to the car, his mother came out the front door to give him a hug. While Jason thought he might have felt embarrassed by this, Jason actually felt jealous of him. Adrian's mother was there in the mornings to fix him breakfast, to take him to school until he got his permit, to tell him to have a good day and hug him goodbye. Jason wished his mother could do the same without worrying about being called in at a moment's notice.

"Morning, Jason," Adrian interrupted Jason's wishful thinking as he placed his bags in the floorboard of the front passenger seat and wedged himself into the car.

"What about me?" Gail asked jokingly.

"Morning, Gail." The two giggled as Adrian turned his attention back on Jason. "Thanks again for the ride. I truly appreciate it."

"No problem," he spoke in his "optimistic" tone. He wanted to mean it wholeheartedly, but at that moment, he was bogged down by the burdens he was carrying. He had learned by now how to put on a mask that disguised his struggles, but

even he wasn't sure how much longer he could perform this act.

***

They got Gail to school and made it to workouts with a few minutes to spare, but when Jason arrived to Honors Government first period, some of his classmates were stopped in their tracks by Mrs. Russell's handwriting on the whiteboard:

SURPRISE! OPEN BOOK TEST TODAY.
USE ONLY YOUR NOTES AND YOUR TEXTBOOK.

"I feel better that I didn't study last night," one of his classmates shared with another classmate. Excited about this unexpected turn of events, he made his way to his desk to retrieve his materials from his backpack. As he unzipped it, he made a heart-wrenching discovery: his textbook and notes were nowhere to be found. "Oh no...no, no, no, no!" As the bell rang for class to begin, it was then he remembered: he left them on his desk in his bedroom.

"Okay class," Mrs. Russell said, coming into the room with the copies of their test as the students took their seats. Counting the number of copies each row of students needed, the teacher handed out the test. Jason tapped the eraser of his pencil on the palm of his sweaty left hand. When the test finally made its way back to him, he stared at the test for a moment, trying to compose himself. *Let's hope studying helps me a little bit.*

***

"How was your test?" Adrian asked as they started their warm up laps around the practice field before practice.

"Well, when you walk in the classroom to learn it's an open book test—"

"That's great."

"...But realize you left your book AND notes at home..."

"Oh, sorry to hear that man."

"At least I studied last night...somewhat. I guess I'll find out how well it helped or didn't help when I get my test grade back." The two were silent for a moment, only hearing the

thudding rhythm their shoulder pads made as they jogged around the uprights.

"Is everything alright with you, Jason?"

"What do you mean? I'm fine."

"It's just..." Adrian hesitated as he stopped jogging before Jason realized it. Jason turned around towards him, placing his hands on his hips. "This is not like you. You are usually on top of things and prepared for anything that comes your way. Like last week. You didn't have your cleats. Yesterday, it was your copy of The Great Gatsby for your literature class. Are you sure everything's alright? You can talk to—"

"Jason!" Their attention was turned to Coach Browning, along with someone the two couldn't make out, as he called for him from the other end of the practice field, waving his hand for him to come towards him. Jason looked back at Adrian, contemplating whether he should continue with the lie he wasn't doing too well maintaining or not, before jogging towards Coach as Adrian continued on to finish his warm-up lap.

"*I hope Coach didn't find out about my test today*", he panicked as he approached Coach.

"Yes, Coach."

"I received an email today from a recruiter from Mississippi State," Coach said.

"Really?" The news was music to Jason's ears.

"Yep. He saw your highlight reels and wants to get in contact with you about playing for his team. He's even talking about scholarship opportunities. Nothing is official, but based on what we discussed, I think that you might get a pretty good offer."

"I can't believe it! That's amazing!"

"I'm proud of you and all the hard work you put into this team." Coach patted him on his shoulder. "You deserve this, and I know your mother and sister will be glad to hear this good news as well." Jason's moment of joy took a hard turn. He didn't think about what would happen if he went to

Mississippi State. Who would be around to help his mother? Who would get Gail to school if his mother has to take an early shift? Who would lend a helping hand around the house after a long day of work? How would his mother and Gail feel about him moving away? "Yeah...they will."

"Aren't you excited? Mississippi State was your top school, right?"

"It is, and I am. It's just a lot to take in at once."

"I know." Coach Browning gave him a final pat on the shoulder before walking off towards the huddle of assistant coaches as Adrian made his way over to where Jason was standing.

"Jason, are you sure you're okay?"

"Truth be told...I'm not quite sure."

***

At least I'm not on shift tonight, he thought as he walked through the front door of his house. After football practice, he was ready to go to bed and end the long day he had. As he made his way to the kitchen, he saw his mother there waiting up for him. "Hi, Jason," she said gently. "I saved you a plate from dinner." She placed a plate of spaghetti for him on the kitchen table and turned to give Jason a hug, one that Jason truly needed and appreciated. "How was your day?"

"It's been a day." He let go of her and sat down to eat. "I guess Gail is in bed?"

"She is, but your day is not over yet."

"What do you mean?" Confused, his mother handed him an envelope from Jackson State University. Realizing Jackson State was closer to home, he opened the letter to see what they had sent.

"What does it say?"

"They're offering a spot on the football team, but it doesn't say anything about scholarships."

"That's great, but maybe they haven't finalized scholarship information yet."

"Maybe so, but," he hesitantly agreed, "Coach told me that a recruiter from Mississippi State wants to meet with me about playing football there as well as possible scholarship opportunities."

"Jason, I'm so proud of you!" She came over and hugged him.

"You have wanted to go there since we visited there a couple of years ago...before the accident."

"I know," he responded in a gloomy tone.

"What's wrong? I'd figure you'll be more excited than this."

"It's nothing."

"Jason, what's wrong?" she asked, sitting in the seat next to him. "I know it's not 'nothing.' Be honest with me."

"It's just...Say that I go to Mississippi State, that's almost two hours away from here..."

"So?"

"What about Gail? How would she feel?"

"Yes, she will miss you, but there is always video chatting and coming home for holidays and weekends. Gail and I could even travel up there to visit you from time to time."

"What if you have a late night or early morning shift at the hospital? What if Gail needs to be taken somewhere or taken care of while you are on shift? What if—"

"I'll find someone and figure it out."

"But I've been the one you depend on to help out since Dad died. It may be stressful for me at times...but—" Jason stopped before he could say anything else. He didn't mean to unload the burden he had carried for so long onto his mother.

"Jason," his mother wrapped her arms around her son. "If you were stressed so much, why didn't you talk to me about it?"

"I...I know it's hard for you to try to find other people who are able to help out on a short minute's notice, so I think just doing it myself will make things easier for you." His mother let go of him. "Besides, I always found it easier to talk to Dad about this stuff."

"Sweetheart, if something's bothering you, you can come talk to me so we can work through it together. And I appreciate everything you do, but some days when you have too many things on your plate, it's okay to say 'no.'"

"But say I go to Mississippi State, I don't want to feel like I'm leaving you stranded without help."

"Sweetheart, you shouldn't have to make your life decisions solely around us. Plus, you still have some time to figure everything out. Hopefully, you'll hear from more colleges with more offers. It's not even the end of football season yet."

"It's just a lot to think about. I like having a plan figured out ahead of time."

"I know, and you stress over plans until they're underway just like your father did. He would be proud of you for all that you're doing in school, athletics, and what you do to help around here. I know how much you love us and want the best for us, but we also want what's best for you. As much I would like for you to go to a college closer to home, you have to go where God is calling for you to go. His plan for you may take you far away from home, but He has a purpose in everything. You just have to trust Him, even when life seems hard in the moment."

"Thanks, Mom." Lord, he prayed. Thank you for the things in life that You have blessed me with. Help me to appreciate these things more rather than worrying about things that I can't control or that are yet to come.

"You're welcome." They hugged for just a moment more until they were interrupted.

" Is everything okay?" They turned to the hallway entrance to see Gail standing there, holding Cuddles.

"Yes," their mother said, continuing to wipe her tears, "everything's fine. Shouldn't you be in bed?"

"I heard Jason and wanted to see him."

"Well, Jason is eating, and you—"

"Mom," Jason jumped in the conversation. "If it's okay, I wouldn't mind her sitting with me until I finish."

"You sure?"

He smiled. "I'm sure."

"Yea!" She ran and hugged Jason as his mother moved his backpack for her to sit with them. As they all sat around the table, Jason took in the laughter of his sister and mother, soaking in every minute of it.

I hope I'm making you proud, Dad.

THE GALLERY

MEGAN BODDIE

41-43

DEIDRE DARBY

44

KAMDEN MARSHALL

45

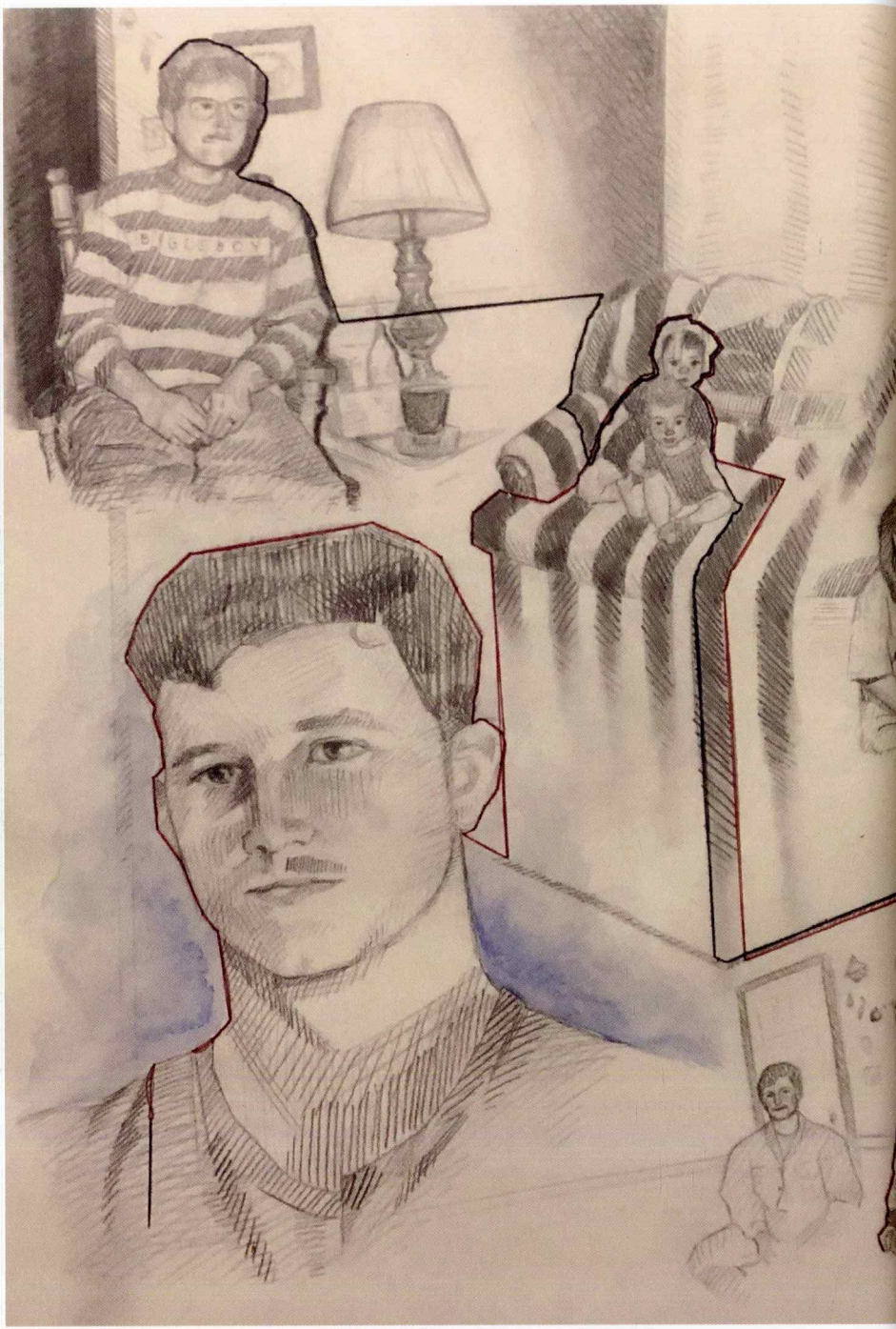
SHANNON VEITCH

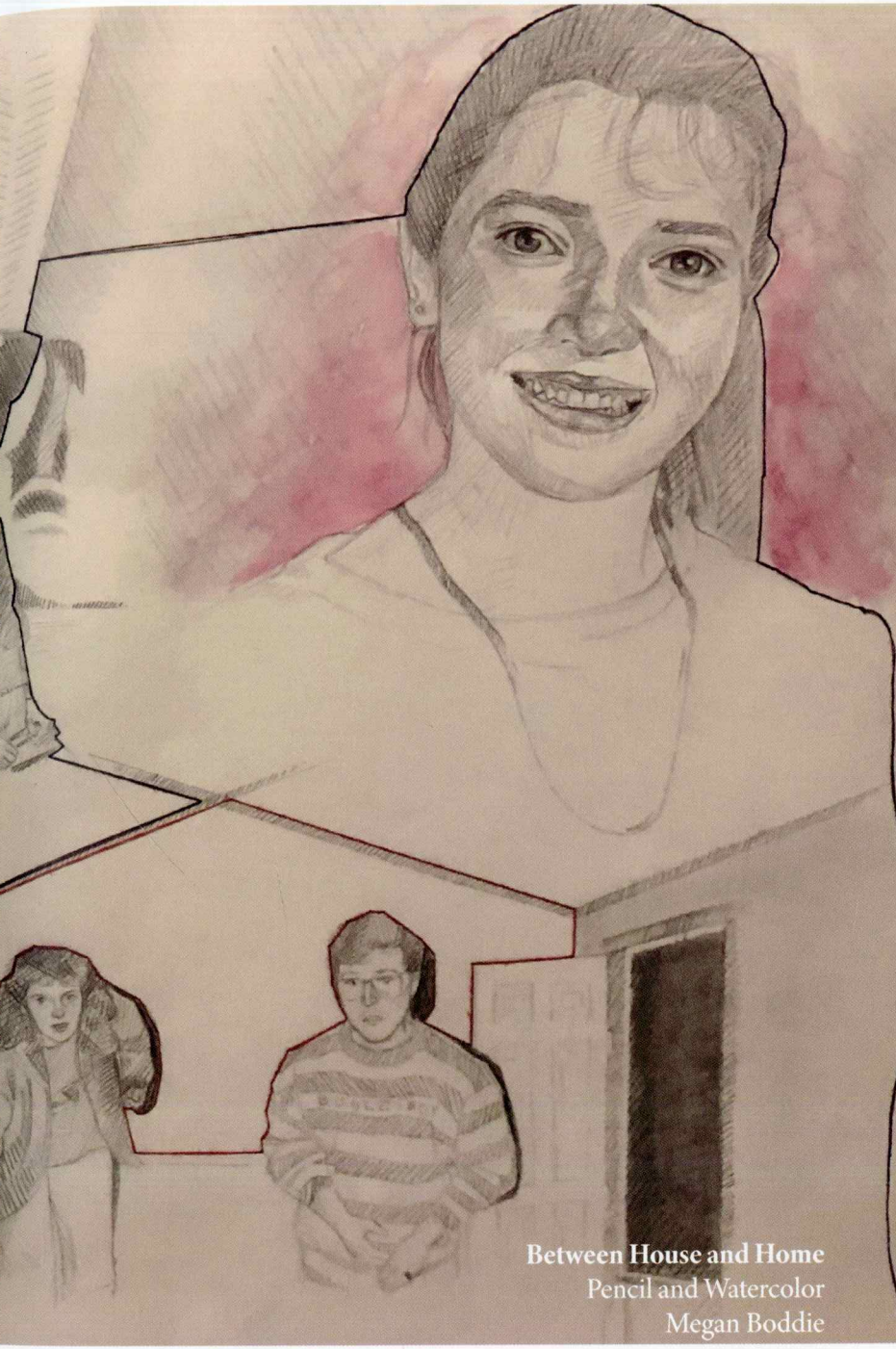
46,47

NATALIE HENDERSON

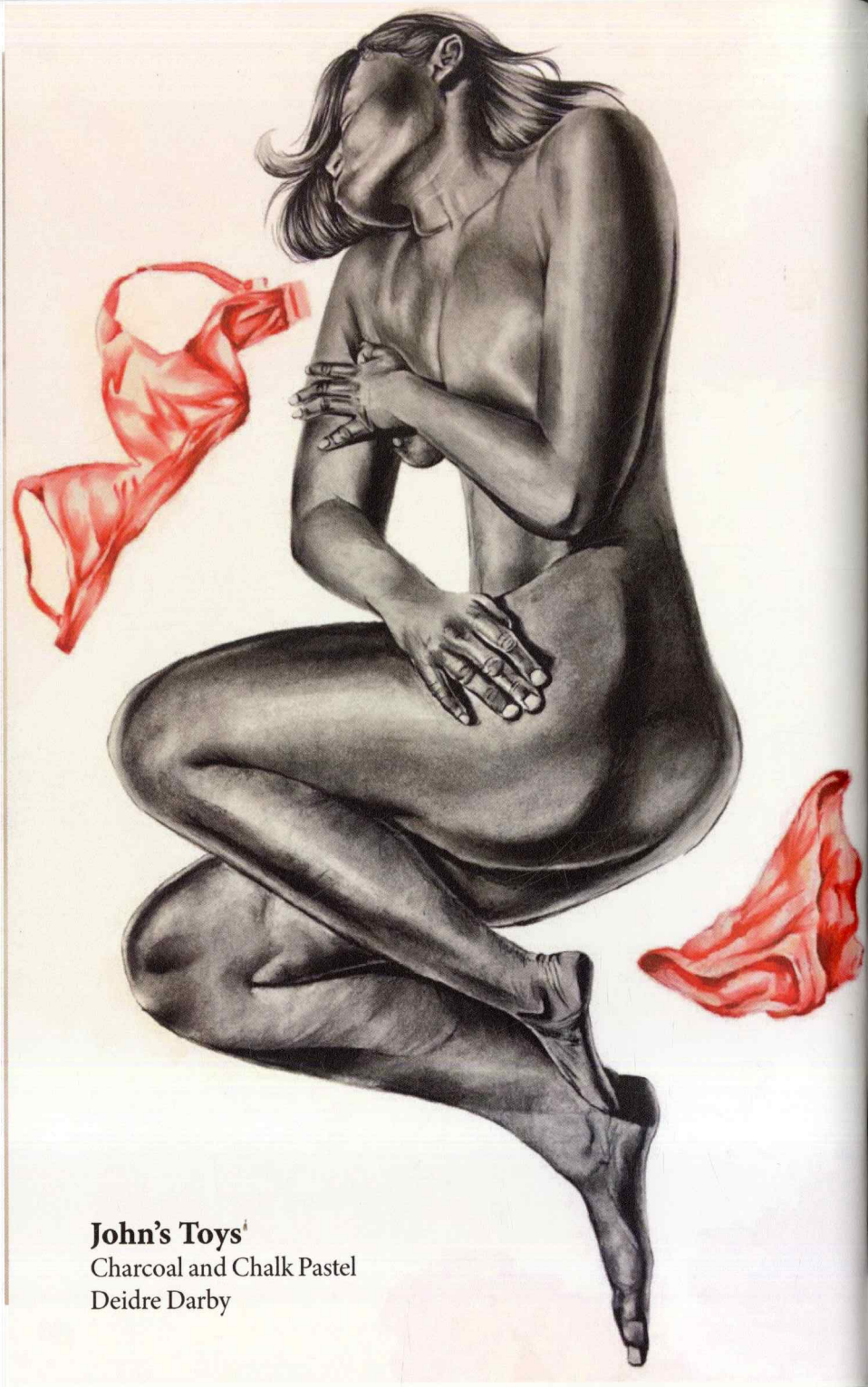
48-51

Reciprocation
Oil
Megan Boddie

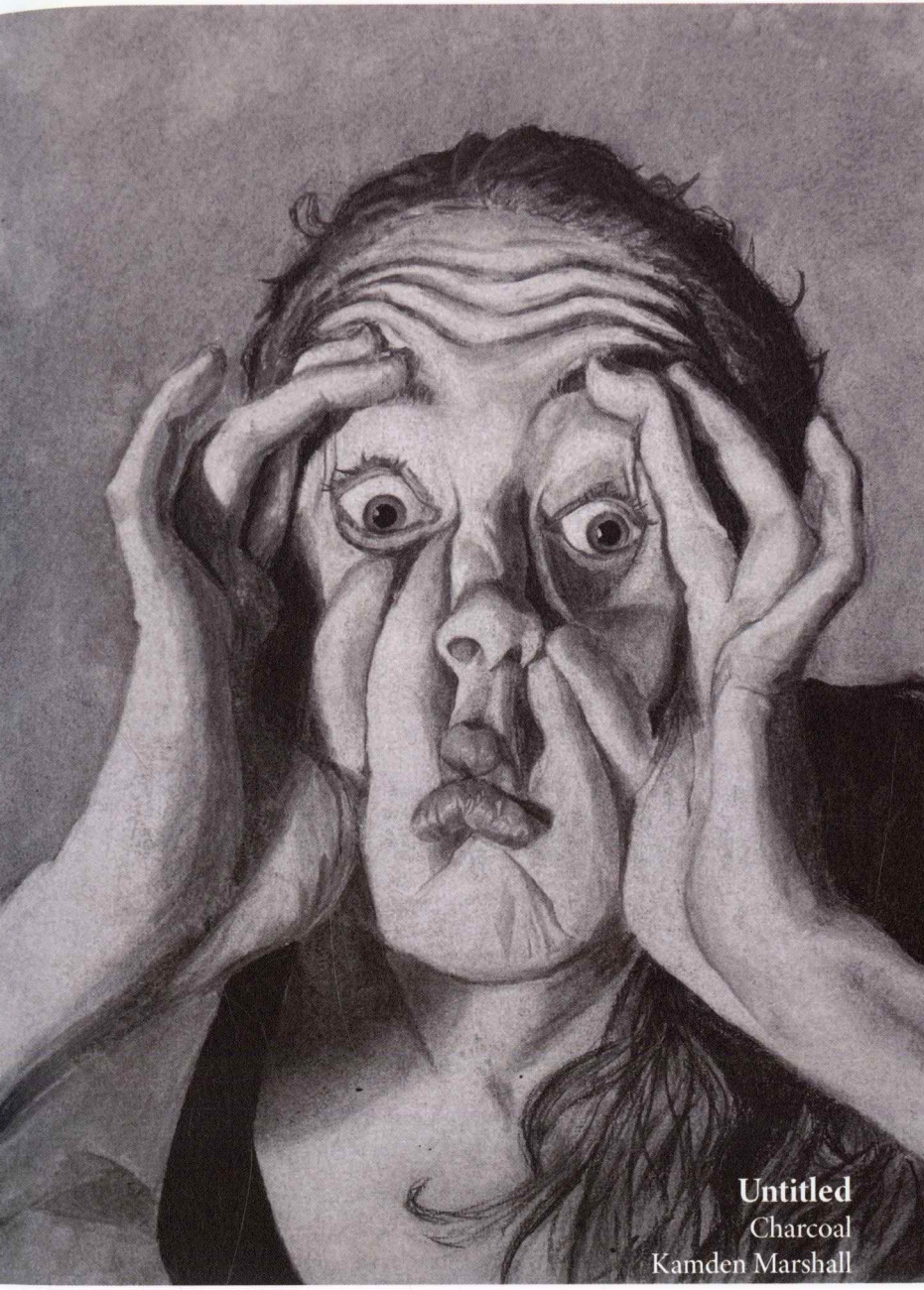

BIG BOY



Between House and Home
Pencil and Watercolor
Megan Boddie



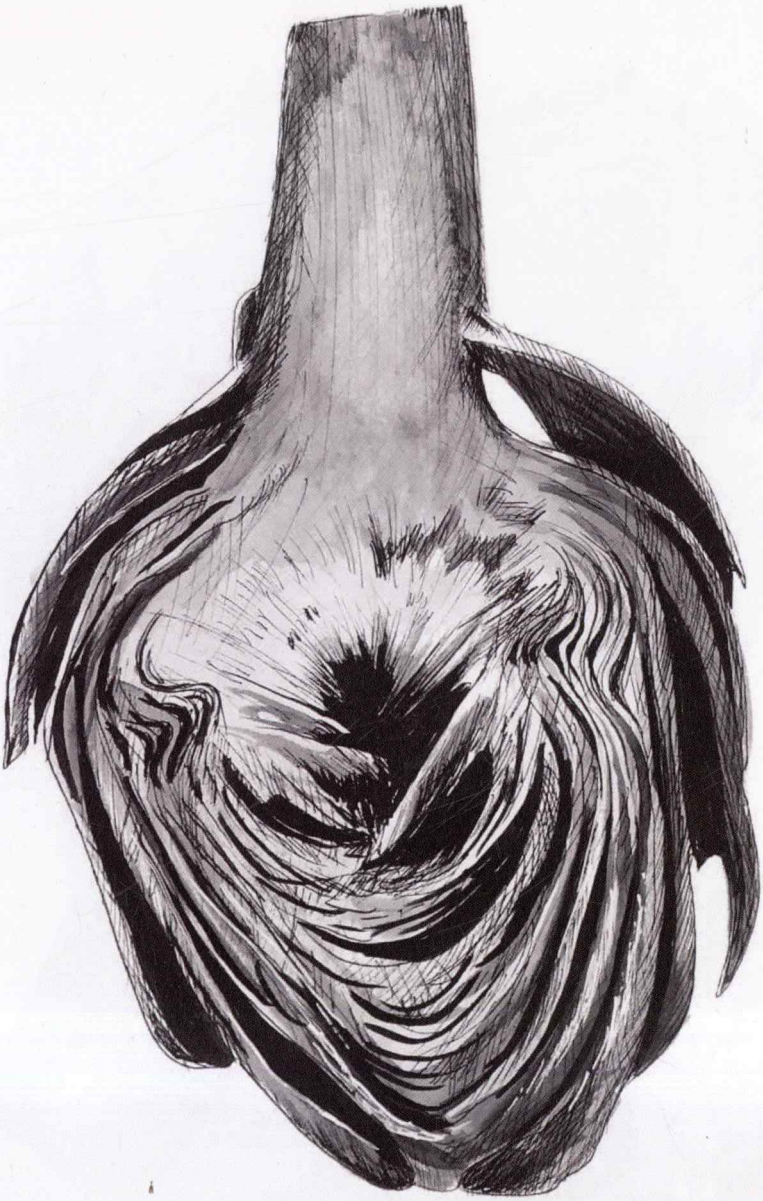
John's Toys
Charcoal and Chalk Pastel
Deidre Darby

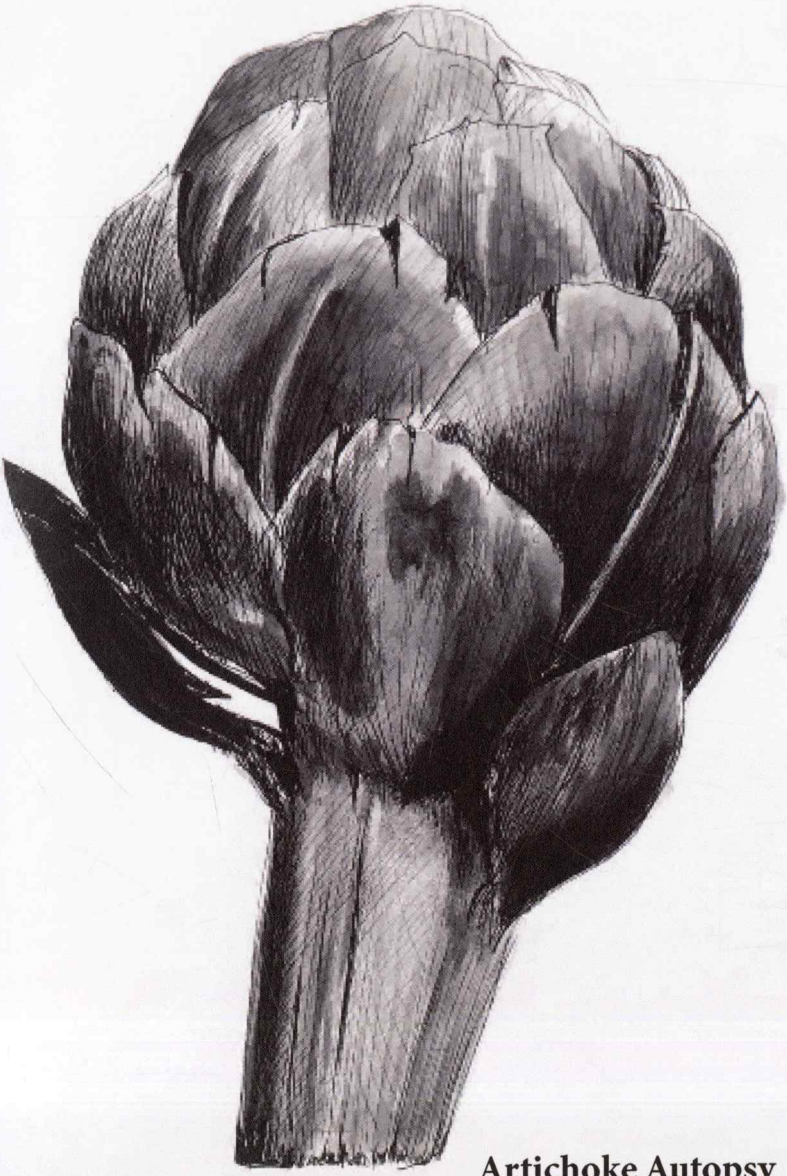


Untitled
Charcoal
Kamden Marshall

Decay
Watercolor
Shannon Veitch

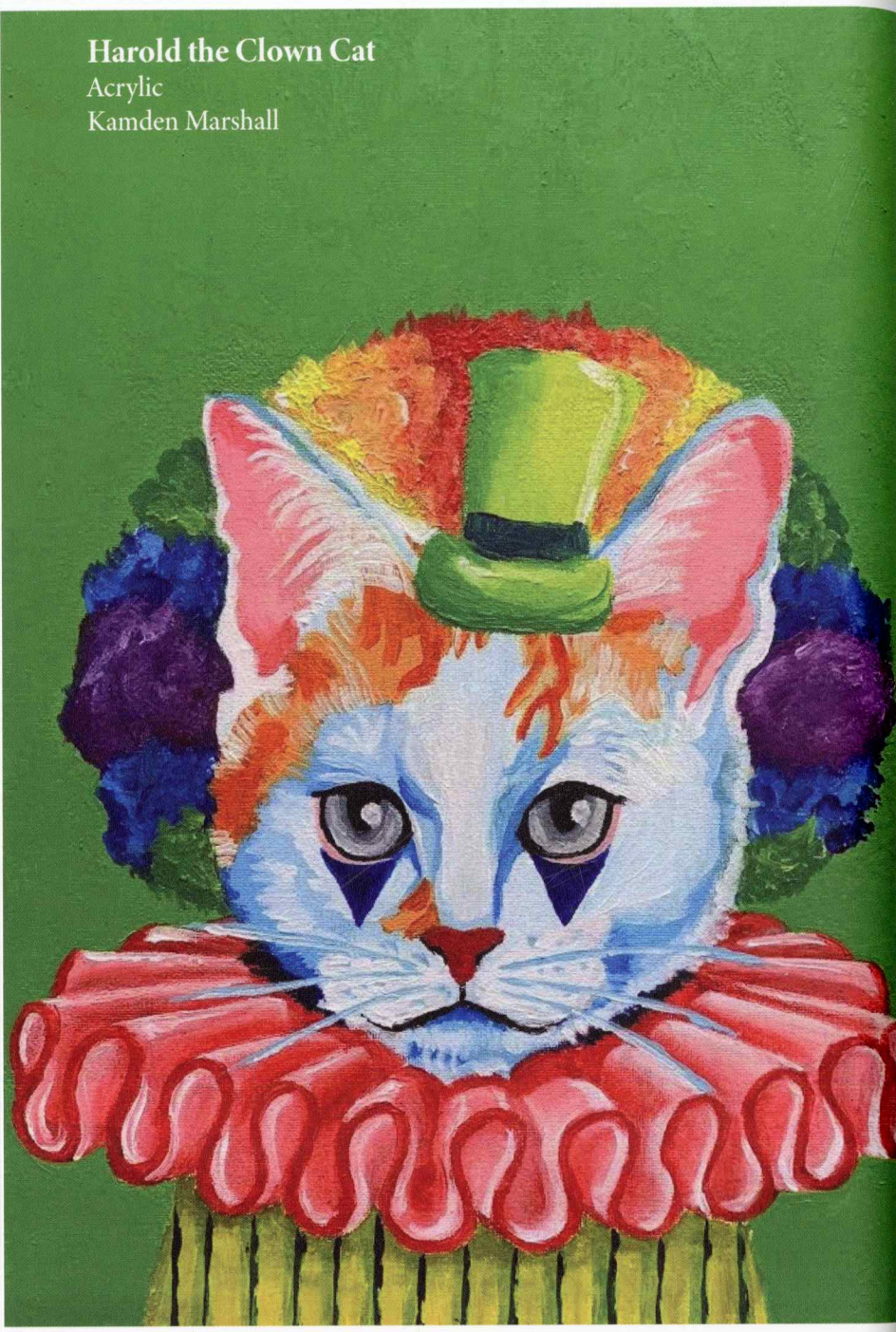
Old Friends
Acrylic
Shannon Veitch





Artichoke Autopsy
Ink and Watercolor
Natalie Henderson

Harold the Clown Cat
Acrylic
Kamden Marshall



You're Ruining My Weekly Coffee

J.K. Spear

I know you're angry with me.
I can also see that you're active on Facebook and I just want you to message me and tell me you miss me.
Or call me because you want to hear my voice.
Tell me you want to see me this weekend because I'll be at my home.
How I want you to send a letter.
Even if the only thing written is: "Hello. I miss you. I love you. I'm proud of you. Bye."
Even if you have to waste money on a stamp for a couple of words on paper.
How is it possible that I'm furious with you and simultaneously want you to say you want to see me?
Why am I sitting in an Einstein's trying not to cry?
How can your presence in my life be both exhausting and the one thing I might actually need?
So, I want you to respond to me.
I want you to say you're happy for me.
I want you to say you want to see me.
But instead, you're going to stay active on Facebook.
And not look at my message at all.

(She messaged back after 30 minutes of being active)

Sequence of Changes
Elliot Eguia

Pi

His heart an open window, I'm surprised that I didn't just pass through. And maybe, in time, I will. For now, however, he brings me sweet tea when I'm thirsty, and listens to me when I have something to say - and I have a lot to say. A lot that sits on the back of my tongue and chokes me. He makes me feel safe to breathe. He lends me the air from his lungs and asks me to only love him in return. He makes it easy enough - like a feather when I expected a freight train. a light sprinkle when I expected a hurricane. making him laugh is a punch of serotonin with a gentle kiss to ease the black eye.

I expect any day now, his halo will arrive in the mail. but he wouldn't keep it - he'd ask if I wanted another. I expect we'll laugh at the idea that I could even get one. And he'll love me anyway.

T'ai

Seasons pass, one after another,
and they will continue to do so until the world no longer turns.
Even then,
I will still love you.

Kou

The feeling of your skin on mine still doesn't seem close enough.
I pray one day we will become so close, that your skin will become mine, and mine will become yours.
Like a Venn diagram, we'll eclipse each other.

T'ung Jen

There is so much of me that lives and dies by you. When my arms wrap around your waist, my head rests on your chest, and my ears hear your heartbeat, I am in my happy place.

When I die, bury me in your chest, not in the dirt. I wish for you to be my final resting place.

And if your time comes before mine, climb into my skin and come with me. Make your home inside the atriums of my heart. Make your playground in my stomach. Make my voice your own. Therefore, we will never truly be lonely.

Wu Wang

In another life, we're six years old, chasing each other around my grandmother's old willow tree and never knowing about heartbreak or what the hell taxes are; we are free to braid flowers into each other's hair, to roll around in the grass, to climb the lowest branches of each other's hearts. we are free.

Femininity

Mallory Curie

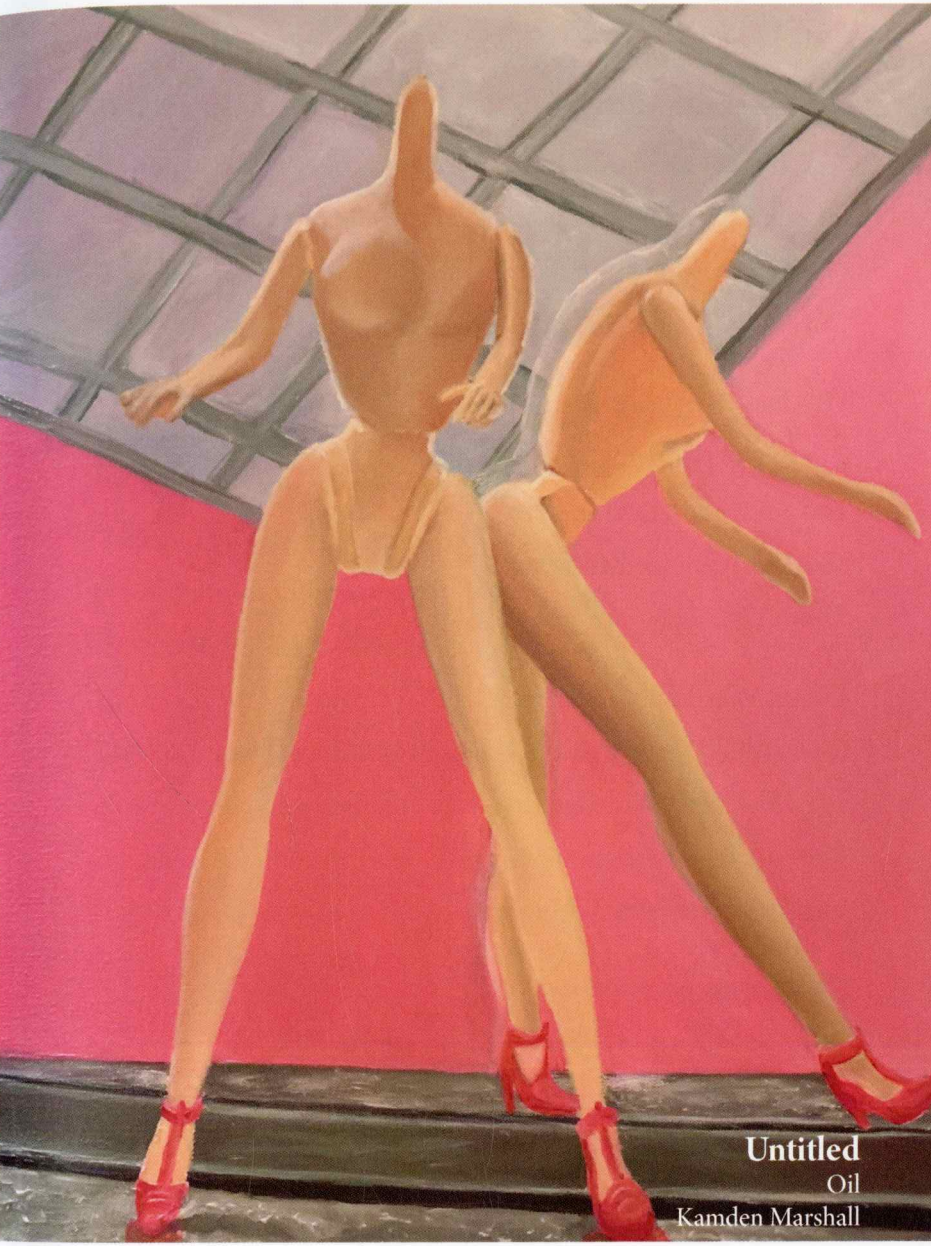
As I leave my apartment, laden down with two garbage sacks bulging with beer cans and rattling glass bottles and a bookbag on my back, a girl strides past me without a glance. And she is a girl being my age, but not a girl for what she had carnal knowledge of that I lacked. I stepped out into the hallway, going the same direction as she, but my footsteps only aligned with hers to avoid the spilled tea puddle, stark against the dingy white floor tiles for its color, like blood-tinged urine or old period blood dripping from the string of a tampon left in for too long.

My gaze tracked up her body. Her chacos whispered over the floor since she didn't lift her feet quite high enough, but the slap of my flip flops was louder in comparison. Her legs were orange and long, slender but obviously instruments of an athlete. Her shorts stopped high up her thighs. Her spaghetti strap top came down low on her back. Her tan line stopped at her shoulders, speaking of time spent with folded up sleeves in the outfield.

When she stretched her arms above her head, she folded them at the elbows like the wings of a crane. Her skin folded, tanned and leathery, belaying hidden strength despite her slender form. Her wrists were thin; I might've been able to loop my forefinger and thumb around them twice, I imagine. She gathered up her hair, brown roots to sun-bleached blonde split-ends, and wraps it in a loose bun on the top of her head. Was her neck like a swan's? I never knew what that meant.

All too soon, she turned the corner and entered the stairwell.

And she never once looked back or broke her confident stride.



Untitled
Oil
Kamden Marshall

There's No Such Thing as People
Ethan Cole

We're pulled into the river;
Our lives are filled with glitter-
Our minds are overflowing-
Our bodies ripped by bullets;
Our bodies are pollutants.

The dams are glowing branches.
The beavers work together;
The Fairies knit their mittens-
Their yarn is unspilled semen.
The only thoughts are pure thoughts.

The whistle shouts a warning-
No warning's ever heeded-
The Heedless go unfettered;
They use their heads as doorknobs.
The doors are pulled wide open.

We float above the river;
The stars shine on our bodies.
The air is filled with tension;
The bullets are our boyfriends-
Our boyfriends are ourselves.

The mittens fill with fingers;
The fingers feel much warmer.
The hands all have no fingers-
The fingers all have boyfriends;
The hands all hold themselves.

The beavers work together.
The babies play with kittens;
The kittens teach the babies:
There's no such thing as people-
The bullets kill each other.

The only thoughts are pure thoughts.
We all have good intentions.
There's no such thing as evil.
The hands all wave in greeting.
The doors are pulled wide open.

Parasite
Kerrigan Russsell

He sticks his hand
In her chest
With all love squeezed
Out of her heart
And eventually rips it out
Weak and grasping
For air, unsure, he
Takes his half full heart
Shares the little that's left
Using every bit to the last drop
Her ability to love is lost
But she realizes she can be saved
Straining him for love
That she cannot return
Draining the love, he has for her
Pushing him away, intensifying
The damage that has already done
Threatening closure, her eyes open
Seeing his sickly heart withering
She lets go of her tight grip, but not
Too much to let him fly away
"I love you", the empty words
She whispers. "I love you too"
He says as tears to start to roll,
Knowing that all he can do is
Give her the love that
She deserves

Burning Masterpiece

Kerrigan Russell

Black and blue
A mixture of the two
Darker and darker
A permanent marker
So many scratches
Make sure it matches
Light it up and make it burn
Waiting for the next turn
Paint it bright
Middle of the night
Mattes and pastels
Water colors on the shelves
Brushes, pencils
All kinds of stencils
Wall to wall
There was one big and tall
Dislike, hate
Playdate with fate
Keys locked the door
Nothing to do more
Exit the building
Beginning to choke
To look at the sky
Covered in smoke

The Werewolf
Janey Magnusen

She sleeps all day, and comes out when the moon is high. Big and bad, with sharp claws, long teeth, black tongue, and bloodshot eyes she stays close to home 'less the mob see her. She spots a pretty young thing walking opposite her, she could smell their sugary scent from a mile away, and she knows she has to stand way off before her instincts kick in. Their skin looks so soft and tender, a dangerous quality to possess in the presence of a wolf. She'd never, she wouldn't, she couldn't, but she could never be sure.

When you're told by the angry mob that you're a danger to others, a monster, you don't believe it at first. But then you see the way people look at you, the way they avert their eyes, the fear and loathing. When you're told something enough, you believe it. You think you deserve it all, because you were born to crave the flesh of all others, no matter the sex. No one is safe from you. A silver bullet couldn't ever cure this craving.

But she knew, she always knew. Even before the mob started telling her those things about me, she knew. She saw the curious look in my eyes, the kind that I believe burns people all the way down. A mere human, a friend rather than a lover, chose to not perceive my wolfish eyes and body. I lay down with her, and she lets me wrap my arms around her. She ignores my sharp claws and teeth, and presses herself against my body. Maybe I'm not as bad as everyone says.

Windows
Mallory Curie

I've heard it before about these
Windows to the Soul.
The eyes, so many eyes
Described as precious,
Bright, and shining,
Emeralds, diamonds, and sapphires.
But my eyes were never that.
Just as my skin and my hair,
Too dark, boring, different,
And too thick brows were never
What the magazines wanted
Until my time of beauty was
Eclipsed.

All my eyes do now
Is weep,
And it burns like
Shampoo-laced contact lenses.
My tears are like
Electricity licking my eyeballs
In a French kiss
With a dirty, dirty tongue.
These teardrops do not bedazzle
My too short eyelashes like stars,
With a dirty, dirty tongue.
These teardrops do not bedazzle
My too short eyelashes like stars,
Like dewdrops on the dawn's
grass.
The tears are just,
So heavy,
And my eyelids twitch
Under the weight
Until I do not want
My eyes to open again
In the morning.

I want to become familiar
With the shadows
Of my hooded eyes
Until there is no more
Sorrow,
Only,
Rest.

Beatrice
Acrylic
Morgan Roe

The Universe
Claycee Alston

The sky
The stars
The moon
The sun
The black holes
The stars they were before These are the things These are the things
They occupy my brain
Like someone
Someone in a portapotty at a rock show
There is so much beauty being heard around them Being seen once upon a time
But now now it's a distant hum
I'm not saying I've seen the beginning
But I've seen it
I've seen this universe blow itself into existence And yes that was a blowjob joke
But never the less
I've seen this world slam
Crash
Crack
And break
Most importantly break
I've seen it

But I've also seen what's come of it
It isnt all beauty and wonder
But it is all magic and amazement
It is all nature
It is all life or no life
I've seen this world before it was a world
I'll see it when it is more
But I'll be able to say I lived it
I watched the world start with one explosion
And end with another
And that
That is precisely how I lived
I broke
But from the shattered pieces
Came magic and life
Or from some no life
But that
That is the beauty of it
Broken doesnt mean damaged
And I refuse to ever think otherwise I mean
Look at the universe

In the Last Dream of Ganymede
Adella Herron

\usepackage{memories}

\usepackage{feelings-emotions}

\begin{newdream}

Ganymede opened his eyes to massive Jupiter suspended low in the harsh, sulfur infinite. Hundreds of shades of pale browns and creamy whites filled the glass behind the metal grilles of his face. His head, like the helmet of an archaic diving suit, swelled with the angry titans of fragility. Jupiter glared back with the red eye of an opposing god, and the android's gold arms tensed under the feeling of scrutiny. He squeezed Hedy close to himself. Her limp head, visor painted red from within, was turned away with her forehead against Ganymede's chest.

Hedy was facing the window that looked out onto the black, molten surface of the moon when she fell asleep next to Ganymede. The muscles in her shoulders expanded with an inhale, then fell with a silent exhale: how full of life she was even in the stillest of moments. Ganymede had wished he was born human. He had wished he could grow old so that she wouldn't have to grow old alone. Wasn't that why he was built: so that she wouldn't be trapped in the diving bell of loneliness? He blinked, and her side of the bed was empty. The room, lit only by the reflection of light bouncing off Jupiter's face from the outside sky, was chilly. The soles of his feet met the floor and disturbed the lava that covered it.

"What is the matter, Hedy?" Ganymede asked her in the living quarters after she remained glued to the window for the past hour. The Kingdom of Olympus was a screaming Hell of

poisonous gas ruled by hundreds of bellowing volcanoes. When the volcanoes were especially ruthless, Hedy swore she could hear the faint and uneasy creaking of the specialized glass that separated her and space.

"Look at all those roses, Ganymede." She said, her breath leaving a small cloud on the glass. "I've never seen so many roses before. It's been a long day, so I think I will go to bed. Will you join me?" She didn't wait for him to answer, quickly leaving the room with the weight of embarrassment and shame upon her head. The plate of scrambled eggs and bacon Ganymede had placed on the table moments earlier steamed anxiously.

"Do you think the station inspectors are coming back anytime soon?" Hedy's voice was a dead woman's flatline.

"Remember, they will be here in 211 days. Why?" In the dark, Ganymede shook his head.

"I'm cold, Ganymede. The lava is too cold out there. And it's lonely. Io is an evil and lonely place." Was all she revealed.

He hugged her and told her that Io isn't lonely when he's with her. She straightened stiffly in the cabin of her silence—in his frigid, android embrace.

"No, I don't think I do." Ganymede admitted in his s cripted, artificial voice not unlike a hum.

"There is nothing for me on Earth. Everything I need goes where you go. I love you, Hedy, don't you know?"

The edges of her mouth pinched into a smile with no

eyes; he never knew her to fake a smile before.

Everything he needed to have meaning was no longer in the Universe. He was under Jupiter with her, a depressurized

mess, in his arms. The pitted surface of the Galilean moon was carpeted with grass and ornamented with rose bushes. Olympus was green. How he wished she could see the wonder of Eden on Io, but the cold and the lava had been too much for her. The ruby roses rustled all around him as he made his way to the greenhouse. There, he would dream like a disorientated diver lost in the gaseous superstorms of Jupiter. Titans and gods would clash in the space above while he slept the sleep of oblivion. Watching his dreams again and again like reruns, he would never understand why he wasn't enough.

\end{newdream}

Compiling...

File Saved. Initiating Permanent Emergency Power-Down.

End

Alloy Bloom
Lost Wax Process
Natalie Henderson

July 31, 2019
Mallory Currie

The hum of the lawnmower is silenced by the hiss of rain slicing the sky
Dappled shadows of sunlight through the clouds –
It's cool, blessedly so for late July
And the sharp stench of gasoline is softened and dulled away,
By the fresh scent of petrichor.

"I didn't think it would rain. It looked like it would rain all week, but not today."
"Mhm."
"Maybe it's a sign from God to go inside today."

The red lawnmower is abandoned in the middle of the yard,
Grass half-shaggy, half-shorn, all waterlogged.
The rose petals hold up from the rain drops and promise sparkling diamonds afterwards.
The vitex's purple buds offer safe-harbor to the fat and diligent bumblebees.
Streaming lines of rain blur with time, and we idle and wait to continue.

"It's gonna drive you crazy if you can't finish, huh?"
"Yeah, I'm gonna finish. Still have to do the front, too."
"Nobody's gonna know."
"But I would know. Don't you know me by now?"

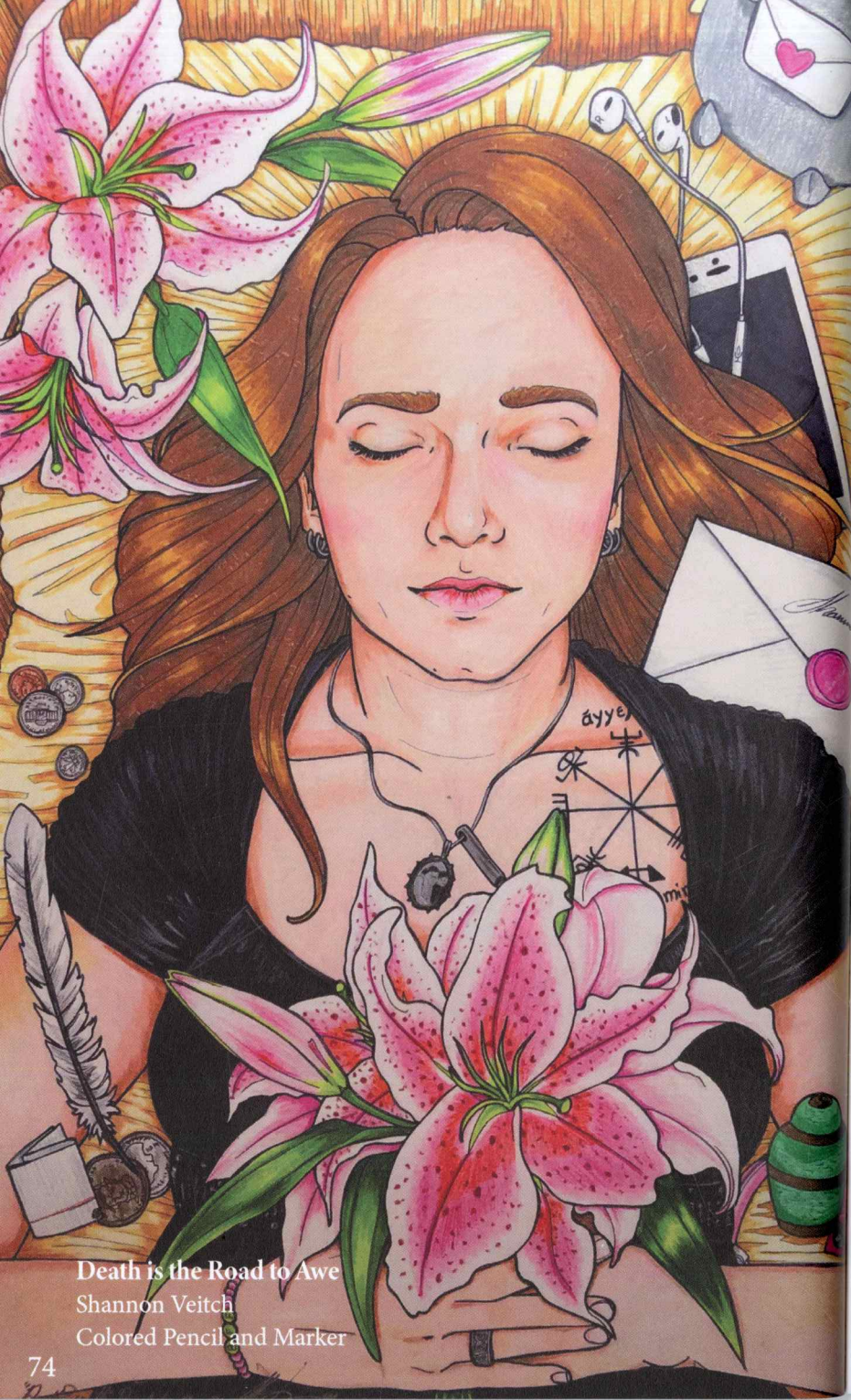
Underneath the shit-bird tree that hangs its branches over the fence, helpfully holding up the birdfeeders, there is a small garden.

Shade-loving Impatients sag, once lipid in the drought and now waterlogged, blooms bright.
The lantana bush attracts more wasps than butterflies, but now it serves as shelter to two industrious chipmunks, or so we believe.
A few purple irises bob their heads and shake their amethyst blooms.
The wind shakes loose some bird seed to the grass, but any helpful feeders are roosted on neighboring roofs, biding time as much as we.

"At least you don't have to water the lawn anymore."

The rain clears and she continues, emptying the clippings and refilling with more gas only once before she moves to the front.
Inside at the kitchen sink, I wash my hands and watch the pigeons swarm the feed on the ground.
Big fat city pigeons, speckled white and black. If it weren't so wet, I'd let Honey out for a chase.

The brown birds hog the feeders, swinging like moneys on the vine. No robins or blue birds today. No gentle cooing doves.
A single hummingbird brings to mind an Emily Dickinson poem.
Effervescent? No, evanescence. Both as they dive like dog fighters, vying for the sugar water.



Death is the Road to Awe
Shannon Veitch
Colored Pencil and Marker

Betrayal
Zoe Hall

Red stained lips, blue veins under pale skin,

Black clouds gather, white lights hide.

Booming thunder fills my ears.

Pattering rain hits the glass

as I fall into a deep sleep.

Warmth surrounds my body when our

minds and souls are one.

Tasting your kisses even when you've left

in the night.

Salty tears fall from the quaking fear.

Your scent lingers in my sheets

and I think of you again.

My love, my sweet love,

I know you never loved me

And yet I yearn for you

and your wretched company.

So Many Memories
Adriel Vinson

Vivi tried to focus on her work shelving books at the library. In thirty minutes, her shift would be over. She'd been sequestered in the back room of the library for hours, alone with the smell of aging volumes, coffee, and the thunk, thunk of books as she stacked one on top of another. But her mind had been straying from her work all day. With thoughts of Cecilia came a whirlwind of memories that played in her mind like a catchy melody.

When Vivi thought of Cecilia, she remembered red balloons at the fair, passing notes in the back of class, the high-top red Converse that she wore every day. Sweet memories that illuminated her dreams and made her wake up on those rare mornings with an ease in her heart that wasn't normally there. With these memories, there were also the recollections of standing alone in an empty driveway. But Vivi tried not to remember the end.

Eight years later and Cecilia was coming home for a visit.

Sometimes it was easy to forget Cecilia. Life had a way of making the past nearly evaporate, and time had slipped by in handfuls, each day like a grain of sand falling through the spaces between her fingers. One minute, Vivi was waving goodbye from Cecelia's driveway, and the next minute she was busy applying for grad school, focusing on her next moves in life instead of remembering the winding roads of the past. It was funny how one simple text from an unfamiliar number could change that.

One text that said simply: Hey it's Cecilia. I'm coming back home for a visit! And every day since then, Vivi had eagerly

watched the calendar for the day to arrive. Now just one day stood between her and her childhood best friend, and containing her excitement was like trying to keep lightning in a jar.

Vivi looked up from the stack of dusty books on her desk and eyed the parking lot through the window of her office. A group of children stood in a circle, laughing and chattering as they bounced a ball between them.

They met on the playground when they were eight. Vivi fell off the monkey bars and scraped her knee. A girl with two ponytails and a half-eaten candy bar in hand had come up to her and said, "Need help?"

When they got older, about thirteen, their parents would drop them off at the fair when it was in town, bills folded into the pockets of their faded jeans. Every dollar was spent on sugary excess. Once Vivi won Cecilia a stuffed puppy at one of the stands.

"Ruffles," Cecilia had laughed, the wide-eyed puppy in one hand and a paper cone of cotton candy in the other. "That's what I'll name him. We can share him, Vivi!"

Ruffles had sat on the top of Cecilia's dresser for years. Would she still have him? Maybe it was ridiculous of Vivi to even imagine it. It was a stuffed dog from a time long gone. Surely she had let it gather dust in the bottom of a storage box by now. Or perhaps it had found its way into the arms of a child who would love it until it was his or her turn to dispose of it.

Vivi showered and fixed her hair when she got back to the quiet

of her apartment. She'd moved away from home two years ago, but some nights, the loneliness of the apartment felt brand new. Sometimes, she would invite a few coworkers over and order take out. But most evenings she spent unwinding at the rickety wooden table in her kitchen as she delved into a book she'd checked out from work. But tomorrow tonight, the apartment would not be a place of such loneliness. Though, she realized as she swept a careful gaze over the room, it could stand to be deep cleaned.

She eyed the red wine stain on the white placemat at the head of the table and sighed.
It was the same color as...

Don't be ridiculous, she chided herself as she removed the placemats from the table and threw them into the stack of unwashed clothes in the bathroom pantry.

She could still remember how Cecelia had looked standing there in a white sequin dress, high top Converse as red as the lipstick she wore.

We'll go as friends, they'd promised, and when the homecoming dance of their sophomore year came, they wore matching white gowns and danced, drunk on life and new possibilities. At the end of the night Vivi had walked Cecelia to her door, lingering on the top step. Their fingertips had brushed...

So close.

Goodnight, Vivi." Cecelia had flashed a smile and turned to open the front door.

The words had been trapped in her throat, held prisoner on her tongue.

Being around you is like being in an endless garden. Your smile makes me feel like I'm wading in water. Tonight was special because I spent it with you.

What if she just said it? Why *not* say it?

The front door of Cecelia's house closed with a resounding click.

Vivi's cousin Loraine arrived to help clean. Loraine's own home was usually cluttered, dishes piled up in the sink, stains on the counters. She spent much of her time lost in her painting, and would emerge from her studio with paint on her face, her hair in a bun atop her head. Despite both of their lack of cleanliness, they were able to finish in less than two hours, and the whole apartment smelled like chemicals and lemons.

"How long has it been since you've seen each other?" Loraine asked, ripping the last Clorox wipe from the container and scrubbing awkwardly at the countertop.

"Eight years." Vivi moved to straighten the chairs at the table before collapsing into one.

Loraine smiled. "Are you excited or worried?"

"Worried?" Vivi eyed the center of the table. She should have gotten flowers. The table looked so bare without the placemats.

"Yeah, worried that things won't be the same as they were?"

Vivi tried to laugh, but it came out sounding more like a croak. "She won't have changed *that* much."

"Maybe not. But what about you?" Loraine asked, tilting her head to the side. "You've changed a lot. Especially since you've been in school. You were nearly a different person eight years ago, don't you think? People change."

"And? Some people are able to pick up where they left off. It happens more often than you might think." Vivi lifted a

stubborn brow. "And I'll bet Cecelia's grown as a person just as much as I have, if not more."

"You never know," Loraine sighed. "What if she's not the same as you remember her?"

Vivi shook her head. She didn't need Loraine planting seeds of doubt in her mind. She was excited to see Cecelia, and Loraine wasn't about to ruin that.

But what if...

What if Cecelia had forgotten all the little things? Had she forgotten that Vivi's favorite color had been blue because it reminded her of a wide-open sky? Would she remember that she liked lemon in her water, no ice in her sodas, and leggings more than jeans? Vivi certainly remembered all of Cecelia's habits, no matter how much time and space stretched between them. It wasn't even that she spent much time dwelling on Cecelia. The memories were just there, sitting inside a vault in the back of her mind, and she could pry it open and reflect on its contents whenever.

Cecelia only liked chocolate cake, rainy mornings were her favorite. She wanted to study to become a vet, her favorite scent was lemon verbena and she collected old records. Time could never mar these memories. They existed just as much as Cecelia did.

Vivi went to bed that night, her head crowded with so many memories.

Growing up, they had had plenty of sleepovers. Cecelia's mother loved having Vivi over. It was just the two of them in the house those days. It got lonely sometimes, she'd said. The sleepover that had most deeply imbedded itself in her memory was the last one they ever had. They'd been fifteen, just after homecoming. Neither had been able to sleep, so naturally they wiled the night away talking about the future.

"When I grow up, I hope I live somewhere quiet, Cecelia had said. "With a big backyard and a fence."

Vivi had smiled. "Me too."

"We should be roommates. You know, one day."

Vivi's face had burned at the thought. Living with Cecelia would be like coming home to her own personal rainbow each night.

"You'd want to live with me?" she'd asked.

Cecelia had pushed a lock of her hair behind her ear. "Of course. We're on the same page about everything. It just makes sense."

She had paused, her eyes snagging on Vivi's own.

"Vivi, I have something to tell you."

Vivi's heart had thrummed, beating against her chest like a desperate bird breaking free from its cage.

"Tell me."

Tell me anything.

Cecelia had hesitated and then leaned to plant a kiss on Vivi's cheek.

Vivi's face burned, her heart fluttering. But all she could think to say was, "What was that for?"

Cecelia's breath hitched. "I'm sorry."

"Don't be sorry."

They sat in the silent moment, fidgeting uneasily. Vivi's mind raced. She opened her mouth to speak when Cecelia said, "I'm moving to live with my father."

Vivi awoke early the next morning, stirred from sleep by the worrying thoughts Loraine had helped to plant in her mind. But she dressed quickly, made sandwiches, and nearly poked herself in the eye with her eyeliner pencil when the doorbell rang. Vivi's face burned, her heart fluttering. But all she could think to say

was, "What was that for?"

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The plan was they would spend a while talking and catching up here, and then they would go into town and maybe get lunch. Maybe Cecelia still loved enchiladas. She hurried to the door and flung it open.

Cecelia stood on the other side several feet taller, her hair curled and hanging past her shoulders. Her brown eyes gleamed in the morning light, and when she smiled, it was as though the air had been knocked from Vivi's lungs. She was even more stunning now than she had been.

With a squeal of delight, she embraced Vivi, who shook her head in disbelief. This wasn't a dream. Cecelia was back in the circle of her arms.

"Come inside!" Vivi beckoned and the two moved to sit at the kitchen table.

Yes, Vivi thought, flowers would have been nice. She pushed the tray of sandwiches toward Cecelia, who was eyeing the door.

"Have a little food. We can go get something more filling later if you want."

Cecelia turned back to her. "Oh, thanks." She grabbed a

sandwich and took a bite.

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Vivi smiled. "So, what have you been up to? Let's catch up."

"Well, I recently got a job teaching," Cecelia said. "And I just bought a house."

"Teaching? I remember when you wanted to be a vet."

Cecelia furrowed her brow for a second, head cocked to the side. "A vet—" She shook her head. "Oh yeah, I can remember that. I said that like, once right?"

Vivi shook her head. "No, you used to tell me sometimes."

"Hm." Cecelia grabbed another sandwich. "I didn't think I talked about it so often. Do you have drinks?"

Vivi stood to grab the sodas from the fridge and Cecelia waved dismissively at her. "I'll do it myself. I insist."

"They're in the fridge. Cups are on the counter." Cecelia rushed to the fridge and brought back the sodas. She filled one cup and then the other.

"Oh," she said, "I forgot to get us ice!"

Vivi looked up at her. "No ice."

Cecelia paused. "You don't want ice in your drink?"

No, don't you remember? Why don't you remember?

Vivi shook her head slowly and took a sip as the doorbell rang again. She looked to the door in confusion. Was Loraine back? Was it her mother, perhaps, paying her daughter a routine visit?

"I'll get that. It's just Barry."

Vivi turned to look at Cecelia, who'd stood to get the door. "Who is Barry?"

We've been together for five years." Cecelia beamed, starting towards the door. "I can't wait for you two to meet."

Vivi stood from the table on shaky legs. "You're a guest and you've just had a long trip. I'll get it."

She gave what she hoped was a warm smile but something in her chest cracked like porcelain, broken shards stabbing into her ribs. It was such a familiar pain. She took a deep breath and opened the door. A tall man in a t-shirt, jeans, and boots stood on the porch.

"May I come in?" he asked.

"Of course," Vivi choked out.

The three sat at the table, and Cecelia and Barry shared stories and sandwiches. They'd apparently gone backpacking in Europe and had spent several weeks helping to build houses for the homeless, they had started a food drive in their community. With each story, Vivi sank further and further into herself, deflating.

"Did you show her the pictures of Ruffles?" Barry turned to Cecelia.

She clapped a hand over her mouth. "I haven't! Vivi, you *have* to see Ruffles." She dug her phone from her purse and shoved the device into Vivi's hands.

It was a small dog with floppy ears. Ruffles.

Anger suddenly burned hot in Vivi's core. Ruffles had been theirs, and now a living, breathing Ruffles belonged to her and Barry. She smiled at them both.

"He's adorable."

"You remember Ruffles, don't you?" Cecelia asked. "I won him for you at the fair, right?"

"I won him for you." Vivi shook her head. "Don't you remember?"

Cecelia shrugged. "It was a lifetime ago, you know. But Ruffles was our baby."

"That he was."

Cecelia leaned over to scroll through nearly twenty more pictures of her dog. With each one, Vivi's face burned a little

hotter. Something like humiliation blossomed deep down and she took a sip of her drink. She hoped no one could see her hands shaking.

"Why reach out now, Cecelia?" the words tumbled from her lips.

Cecelia grabbed onto another finger sandwich. "Don't you ever just reflect, Vivi? I wanted to come see my old friend. It's been eight years. We were kids."

Vivi remembered standing in the driveway of the pastel colored house in the suburbs. She stared across the street at two young girls running through a sprinkler. They laughed, their clothes and hair drenched as they squealed. It wasn't fair. She and Cecelia were being torn apart and there was nothing anyone could do about it.

She and Cecelia stood beside one of the moving vans. It had never been hard to talk to Cecelia before, but what did you say to someone who you may never see again? How could she even begin to organize everything she wanted to say?

"Cecelia..." She took a deep breath. "Can you promise me something?"

Cecelia looked up at her, her eyes glistening with tears. "Yes?"

"Promise me that one day...we'll see each other again, and when we do, we'll pick things up right where they left off. *Please.*"

Cecelia nodded and threw herself into Vivi's arms. She buried her face in Cecelia's hair. "Of course. Right where we left off." Her lips twitched into a small smile. "Then we can dance again, just like we did a few nights ago at homecoming."

Vivi met her gaze and nodded. It was a promise.

That evening, after chatting for several hours over finger sandwiches and sodas, Cecelia and Barry stood and made towards the door.

Vivi rose with them to see them out. She plastered a small smile on her face as Barry slid past her and out the door.

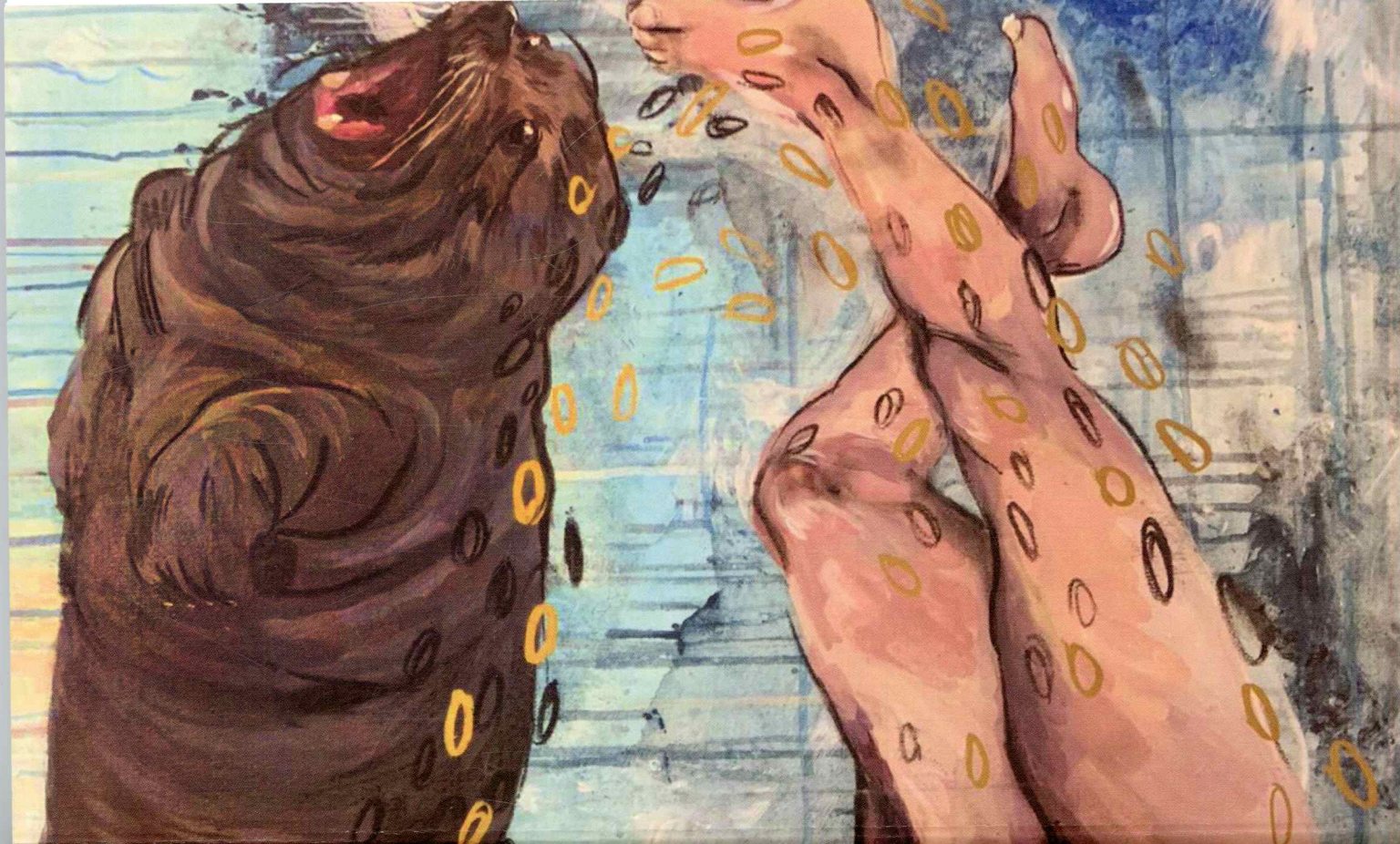
"Goodbye, Cecelia," Vivi said, as her old friend stepped out onto the porch.

Cecelia froze suddenly and then turned to look over her shoulder at Vivi. "Things have changed so much, Viv."

Vivi nodded. "They have."

She looked into Vivi's eyes. "And it's a shame we couldn't dance."

Cecelia pulled the door closed with a resounding click.

Rebirthing
Emma M.

A mother,
the ferocious dog that stalked me
while I waited.
Patiently for the day I could burst
through my own doors and sing
Loud enough
to where the gods themselves
would hear me.
Happy, melodic, spirited.
And the potatoes on the counter
won't be mashed,
they'll rot for me.
And a new beginning will rise.